

ISSUE 21, APRIL 2021

# APIARIST'S ADVOCATE



News, Views & Promotions - for Beekeepers - by Beekeepers

## From One Beehive to Another



Are the millions of dollars being spent  
by Government on beekeeper training  
achieving the desired results?

# Fees Free Failings



The Government funded nearly 2000 people into apiculture training in 2020, spending upwards of \$5.5million under the Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund (TTAF), in an effort to provide more skilled workers to the beekeeping industry. Many in apiculture have doubts about the usefulness of the scheme though, with concerns it is not meeting the needs of the industry by failing employers, beekeepers in general and, in some cases, even the students who should be benefitting most.

**As part of the Government's plan to get more New Zealanders into work and aid recovery from job losses and the economic upheaval caused by Covid-19, the TTAF made \$1.6 billion of tax payer money available to improve access to study in a range of industries, including primary industries.**

The goal of the spending was to "invest in training and education for people who might have lost their jobs, or who want to move into a different sector where prospects are better," Education Minister Chris Hipkins said at the time of the scheme's announcement in May last year.

That meant fees-free training for apprentices and those enrolling in Level 3 to 7 national qualifications, which includes numerous apiculture courses delivered around New Zealand.

However, in the apiculture industry several employers say those coming from many apiculture courses are inadequately prepared for the realities of commercial beekeeping, while some students of a Level 3 beekeeping course feel aspects of their training have been inadequate, including a completely online training and assessment programme.

Further to that, a major beekeeping club in the North Island has raised concerns that the large number of students graduating with hives, which are required as part of the study, are ill prepared to

manage their bees and honey to the legal requirements.

All up, there are numerous stakeholders around the apiculture industry who believe the tax-payer funded TTAF scheme is not meeting many of the needs of apiculture that it was intended to.

## COME ON IN, THE DOORS OPEN

Unsurprisingly, the introduction of fees-free study saw enrolment numbers swell for tertiary apiculture training in 2020, with a 75 percent increase in those working towards apiculture qualifications.

Education Commission numbers detail 1005 students enrolled in "provider-based training" in 2019, with that jumping to 1680 in 2020, delivered through tertiary institutes such as Otago Polytechnic, Southern Institute of Technology (SIT), Eastern Institute of Technology, Pacific Coast Training Institute, Land Based Training, NorthTec and Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology.

Alongside that, in 2019 there were 125 beekeepers enrolled in "industry-based training" through the New Zealand Apprenticeship in Apiculture for in-work beekeepers. That jumped to 300 in 2020.

TTAF funding is paid directly to training organisations on the student's behalf, while employers of apprentices are eligible for a \$1000 "support" payment in the apprentice's first year and an additional \$500 in their second.

In 2020 apiculture training programmes cost the New Zealand taxpayer over \$5.5million, with the scheme set to run into 2022.

## "COMPLETE WASTE OF TIME"

While beekeeping employers spoken to by *Apiarist's Advocate* say they envisage, and are experiencing, value in the apprenticeship scheme, the swelling of numbers in provider-based training is delivering them little to no benefit. One large North Island employer says it has been "a complete waste of time" trying to employ graduates from polytech courses.

At DownUnder Honey in the Manawatu, owner Amanda Prior has also not had success employing apiculture graduates.

"We had a number of people apply for our recently advertised apprenticeship position, including some who had completed a polytech beekeeping course. None from the course showed up when we invited them in for a quick meet and greet to talk through things though," Prior says.

In past seasons they have employed seasonal workers that have boasted apiculture



Education Minister  
Chris Hipkins announced the  
\$1.6billion TTAF scheme, which  
includes funding for apiculture  
training, in May 2020.

qualifications from a polytech, but Prior says they have had a lack of basic beekeeping knowledge, how to work hives and what needs to be done through the seasons.

Currently they have four employees studying towards the Apprenticeship in Apiculture, including two beginners, and are confident that the course work will reinforce the on-the-job learning.

At Kintail Honey, who have in excess of 13,000 hives spread across the North Island, management echo Prior's dismay at the quality of beekeeper and worker trained through polytechnic courses.

"People who come from those courses usually don't last and they say that they learn more in three days working than they learnt on the course," the Kintail Honey manager says.

Kintail Honey have had experience with employing graduates for the past four or five seasons and, despite an increase in training numbers recently, nothing has changed.

"Those polytech courses are not preparing students for a commercial beekeeping environment in any way, shape or form. They just can't adjust. They are more suited to hobbyists.

"They are given an idea that beekeeping is a lovely little thing to do. I don't think many realise it is an occupation and you have to work hard and be physically fit."

*DownUnder Honey  
have experienced  
limited success in  
employing graduates  
of beekeeping courses.*

#### HIVE CARE

There is another downside to the surge in students studying apiculture too, says the president of one of New Zealand's largest beekeeping clubs, Brian Cowper of Beekeepers Hawke's Bay.

Cowper has extensive experience in industry training, having spent much of his working life in training management positions and having held senior roles at the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and Careers New Zealand, which is now the Tertiary Education Commission. He says, that while their Hawke's Bay club is doing their best to support a flow of students who come from polytechnic courses with their own beehive, the training institutes need to be doing more.

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"These training providers should have an obligation, post training, to make sure the people coming out of the courses have a pathway to do something with the hives which they are provided, knowing they are not all going to become commercial beekeepers," Cowper says.

"I have to respect the fact that many of those graduates are encouraged to join our club and many of them do. They are keen as mustard to learn and grow a business in the industry, but the money is not there for them. There is no responsibility accepted by the polytechnics or the private training providers post-graduation."

Cowper has concerns about the dangers which inadequately cared for hives present to all beekeepers, plus there is the risk of tutin compromised honey reaching consumers from the hives of graduates who don't fully understand their requirements as a honey producer.

Cowper's vast experience in designing training models for industry have him well placed to assess the model currently at play in apiculture. He sees some major flaws which require a broad reassessment, with a more successful training model likely to focus on masters leading apprentices, rather than swelling the numbers in polytechnics and local training providers.

"We need to convey the message that beekeeping is a trade that comes with a variety of skills that just isn't for everyone," Cowper says.



*Many students of tertiary apiculture training are ill prepared for the realities of commercial beekeeping, such as blowing and carting honey boxes, employers say.*

#### COURSE LIMITATIONS

While employers claim a lack of worth in the graduates of "provider-based training" for the commercial workforce, and Cowper has concerns for the wider beekeeping industry, some



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students have also voiced displeasure about their fully online Level 3 apiculture course.

The students claim that during their Level 3 training delivered by Telford through SIT the main tool of assessment, along with written work, are students presenting videos of themselves completing various apiary tasks. No in-person or in-hive teaching or assessment has taken place, they say.

While SIT appears to provide the only completely online course, there are aspects of many apiculture training courses delivered via the internet.

There are limitations of online teaching models says Nick Wallingford, a long-time Bay of Plenty beekeeper who has designed and delivered apiculture training courses in the past, including one used by the National Beekeeping Association as a national training program in the 1990s.

Certain types of training can aid "knowledge recall". However, beekeeping requires not just knowing information, but being able to practically apply it. Online learning has deficiencies in teaching that practical application, he says.

"You can certainly teach a beekeeping course entirely online, but you would have to be incredibly realistic about what learning outcomes you were going to achieve," Wallingford says.

"For instance, you would not be able to say 'by the end of this course the student knows how to carry out basic techniques to prevent swarming of a hive.' Because you can't judge that by correspondence."

Online delivery, which is now incorporated into a range of Level 3 and 4 apiculture courses, could also be limited by students' ability and willingness to cope with different technologies.

### HOBBYISTS UPSKILL

While employers are doubting the ability of many graduates to fill paid beekeeping positions, it appears many of those funded to complete apiculture study may have little intention of ever seeking work in the industry anyway.

At Hive World in Porirua, owner Rod Williams says his beekeeping equipment supply company has benefitted from the government backed courses as students are funded to purchase basic beekeeping equipment. He supplies some courses directly, and he has met many students who enrolled at a nearby polytechnic course who have come in store.

"A lot of them are people who have just thought, 'I'd like to know more about bees', but I could imagine that after the course is finished that half of them would go away and not do anything with bees or maybe just have a hive in the back yard," Williams says.

Otago Polytechnic apiculture course controller David Woodward says that, in his estimation, less than five percent of course participants end up in paid beekeeping employment.

Hobbyist beekeeper (less than 50 hives) registrations have increased every year for the past 10 years, going from 2722 in 2011 to 8314 in 2020.

Williams says that increasing the skills and knowledge of those beekeepers is a good thing, but adds "whether the training is actually helping the commercial guys at all is the question though".

### GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT

At Apiculture New Zealand head office in Wellington, general manager Karin Kos says complaints about failings in the industry

training model have not reached her desk thus far, but she understands that many of the newly enrolled are hobbyist beekeepers.

Kos says she would be "disappointed" if training is not working for industry, but points to the Apprenticeship in Apiculture, designed in conjunction with ApiNZ, as a model they are pleased with.

"With the apprenticeship program we have worked as an industry to make sure the training is relevant. I couldn't comment on the other courses so much, but the apprenticeship scheme that has been put in place has been industry driven and about providing the pragmatic training we need to get people work ready," Kos says.

That may be the case, but with 1980 students studying apiculture in 2020, of which only 300 were enrolled in the apprenticeship program and the rest in provider-based courses, the "pragmatic training" Kos speaks of is clearly not reaching all students.

It appears the training model in place, from how students are recruited, to the teaching and assessment techniques used, follow-up support and desire to have graduates work ready, all appears to be far from optimal.

With over \$5.5million of taxpayer money spent in 2020 and the funding model set to last at least into 2022, taxpayers could be left to foot a much larger bill despite limited success for, and even threats to, apiculture. 🐝



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## BY THE NUMBERS:

# Beekeeper Training

### WHO PROVIDES THE TRAINING?

Training falls into two categories: *industry based training* or *provider based study*.

Industry based training comes in the form of an apprenticeship for those working for a commercial beekeeper. It has been developed through Apiculture NZ and is delivered through Primary ITO.

Provider based study is delivered in a range of methods by tertiary institutes, usually with a mix of apiary, classroom and online learning. Courses are offered through Otago Polytechnic, Land Based Training, Eastern Institute of Technology, Pacific Coast Training Institute, NorthTec, Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology and Telford (through Southern Institute of Technology) all offer courses.

### HOW MANY BEEKEEPERS ARE BEING TRAINED?

The apprenticeship scheme had 125 students in 2019, 300 in 2020 (140% increase), while the provider based courses went from 1005 in 2019, to 1680 students in 2020 (a 67% increase). It is thought that the introduction of a 'fees free' scheme in 2020 explains the spectacular jump in student numbers. Up to that point students would typically pay \$1200 in course fees.

### HOW MUCH DOES IT COST THE TAX PAYER?

These figures from the TEC pertain to the number of courses funded. (NB They may not correspond exactly to student numbers because it is possible for one student to do more than one course.)

### STUDENT NUMBERS

APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME	125	300	140%
	STUDENTS IN 2019	STUDENTS IN 2020	STUDENTS INCREASE
PROVIDER BASED COURSES	1005	1680	67%
	STUDENTS IN 2019	STUDENTS IN 2020	STUDENTS INCREASE

### COST TO TAXPAYERS

APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME	300	AT	\$437,760
	COURSES		AT \$1,459 PER COURSE
OTHER PROVIDERS LEVEL 3 COURSES	1680	AT	\$4,900,540
	COURSES		AT \$3,825 PER COURSE
LEVEL 4 QUEEN RAISING COURSES	70	AT	\$173,305
	COURSES		AT \$2,475 PER COURSE



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# Meet the Trainer – David Woodward



With 16 tutors, 450 Level 3 students and 70 studying queen-bee raising Level 4, Otago Polytechnic is currently New Zealand's largest apiculture training provider. Course controller David Woodward's experience is broad-ranging. He sits down for a discussion on their courses and industry training in general.

**Woodward holds a BA in botany and zoology, plus a PhD focused on bumble bee pollination of kiwifruit. After a stint as an apiary advisor in South Australia, he returned to New Zealand where he was head of Telford in 1997. Around 2000 he convened an industry group to thrash out standards for national beekeeping qualifications and his text book on queen raising was published in 2007.**

**Apiarist's Advocate:** What is the commitment for Level 3 students?  
**Woodward:** Bearing in mind they're often beginners, they have to buy their own protective gear and nucs. There are 16 field days in the apiary, these are very solid full days. Once a fortnight the class meets for an on-line group discussion.

**AA:** What form do the assessments take?

**Woodward:** Everything is now done online. The young ones pick it up quickly. Some of the oldies struggle with this. All teaching material is available to the students through the online platform Moodle. So, access to computers and wifi can be an issue. Having said that, we still use text books –Matheson's Practical Beekeeping in New Zealand is still a great book.

**AA:** What do you assess?

**Woodward:** This is primarily an apiary-based course where we teach evidence-based beekeeping. The Unit Standards have been hammered out by primary ITO and the industry. We look at lots of skills from making your own beehive, to managing bees right throughout the season. And, of course, in addition to the teaching hives, the students have their hive at home. Every time they look in a hive they write it up in their apiary diary and then reflect on what happens.

**AA:** This is the first year of 'fees free'. Usually the student would expect to pay around \$1200. Have you noticed any difference in student retention?

**Woodward:** There's always the odd one that pulls out, but the attrition rate has been no more than usual this season.

**AA:** You've been teaching for a while, any idea how many of your former students end up working in the industry?

**Woodward:** I don't have figures, but full-time industry workers would be quite low, perhaps one to five percent. Some students increase their numbers by 20 or 30 hives, but mostly they're hobbyists. An important aspect of the full-time Telford course was

three weeks' work experience with a commercial beekeeper. Some of them said 'I can't work this hard', others loved it. I remember taking a group of students to a national conference in the early 2000s and they were all offered jobs.

**AA:** Some in the industry say that with low honey prices and some business contracting we're training too many beekeepers.

**Woodward:** In the past we've always had a shortage – that's why we bring beekeepers in from overseas. If you really want to a job - it might only be seasonal - you can find one. Commercial beekeepers are always contacting me looking for workers.

**AA:** You've introduced a Level 4 Queen Raising course this season. What's the justification for this?

**Woodward:** I think this is something the industry needs. Since the advent of varroa it's advisable to re-queen more frequently. It is essential for good hygiene. It also makes the student more employable. You get lots of grafting practice, study genetics and look more closely at bee behaviour, like their ability to uncap larvae and evict varroa.



David Woodward,  
head of Otago  
Polytechnic's  
apiculture  
programme.

**AA:** Do you ever worry that we focus too much on bee diseases in our beekeeper training?

**Woodward:** Yes, the pathological model can be depressing, but it's crucial that students can recognise disease. If established beekeepers are confident new beekeepers know what to do about disease they will support them. But yes, we've got to get beyond varroa and highlight all the cool things bees can do like making honey and performing dances. The important thing is for the student to get enough experience to know what a healthy hive looks like. If you see something suspect you can send a photo through for group discussion. As the students learn more about the biology you can see their rising enthusiasm.

**AA:** Do you ever have students who over-extend themselves?

**Woodward:** Yes, you have to emphasise that even if you're a good student you're still really green. If you have ambitions best to work for a couple of seasons for someone else. The manuka honey boom has created a 'get rich quick' mentality. You hear of cases where once the crop is taken they let the bees die. It's crazy. Once you own a hive you take on a legal and moral responsibility. It's like having a dog or horse. Perhaps this downturn in honey prices is no bad thing. Now people are getting into it for the right reasons. But even running a couple of healthy hives is worthwhile – you're creating a sustainable environment.

**AA:** What effect do you think the impending amalgamation of polytechnics will have on beekeeper training?

**Woodward:** Having too many courses can be really confusing. Otago is well positioned to offer collaboration with other polytechnics. Why keep on re-inventing the wheel? It's so wasteful. That's the whole rationale for amalgamation. We see negotiating partnerships where we share funding with the local polytechnic. In fact, this is happening already – Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology is now running the Otago programme.

**AA:** What developments in beekeeper training do you see over the next 10 years?

**Woodward:** We've come a long way. We'd like to develop the Level 4 programme where we look at how to make a dollar out of bees. This would include such things as: seasonal planning, risk management, different products of the hive, plants important to bees. How to run 30 to 40 hives for a profit.

**AA:** Do you keep in touch with former students?

**Woodward:** Sometimes the students, current and former, ring you up in a bit of a state about some catastrophe. We talk quietly and usually work it out together. It's what Maori call ako – teacher and student are teaching each other. 🐝



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# Apprenticeships at Work



The Apiculture Apprenticeship saw a spike in registrations in 2020, aided by government “fees free” funding, but also because it is proving its worth proponents say. We learn what is involved with the Level 3 and 4 industry-based training.

**The apprenticeship scheme was launched in the spring of 2018. At the time, as an employer Egmont Honey owner Toby Annabell put the reasons for this plainly.**

“We can't get enough Kiwi beekeepers in New Zealand. We currently have people coming in from overseas to do the job, so we hope by running this scheme we can get more into the industry. We need qualified people in New Zealand so we wanted to look after our own guys.”

In many ways it has the same virtues as any apprenticeship scheme. For the student there's confidence of long-term employment and gaining a qualification on the job that will enhance their progress through the industry. For the employer there's a lot to like, such as motivated students whose growing skills will add value to their business.

Stuart Fraser, as Apiculture New Zealand's chair of the Education and Skills Focus Group, was, and still is, closely involved.

“The starting point was to standardize training for the whole country. To do this in the past the student would go to Telford for weeks on end, but that model is no longer feasible,” says Fraser.

Many of the practical assessments are done on the job, so it's possible for the scheme to cover the whole country. In many cases the assessor is the employer, and those cases where they are not, an independent 'verifier' comes to ensure the student has covered the necessary steps in any particular procedure. Theory assessments can be done on paper or digital.

Most of the apprentices study Level 3 or Level 4 qualifications, with many of them doing both. At Level 3 there is a three-day block course, while Level 4 entails a five-day course. These occur at the nearest main centre.

Despite some employers questioning the value of provider-based study, Fraser sees the apprenticeship scheme working in complementary fashion with polytechnics.

“These other courses can still be a pathway into employment, but you won't have the experience in the industry. You should know about disease recognition and how to keep bees healthy though, which is excellent for the industry.”

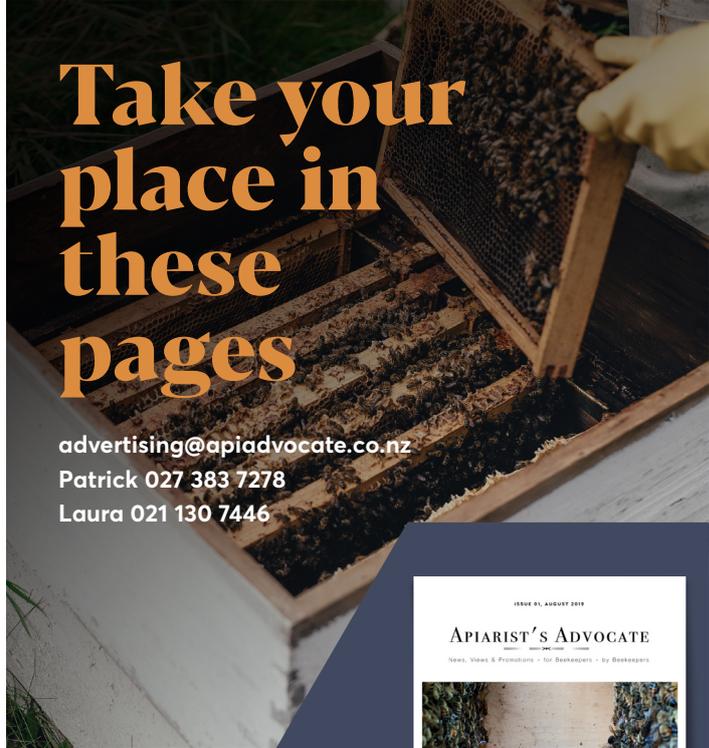
He points out that you don't necessarily have to hump 30kg honey boxes about to work in the industry. For him it's all about the individual finding a niche in beekeeping that suits them.

“If night work is your thing you might work for a pollination service.”

Starting with 125 apprentices in 2019, in 2020 it grew to 300.

While admitting that keeping ahead of training requirements in widely fluctuating markets is always a challenge, Fraser is confident of the scheme's future, with its virtues now apparent to both parties.

“Some of the early adopters are seeing the benefits, with those students now potentially team leaders.”



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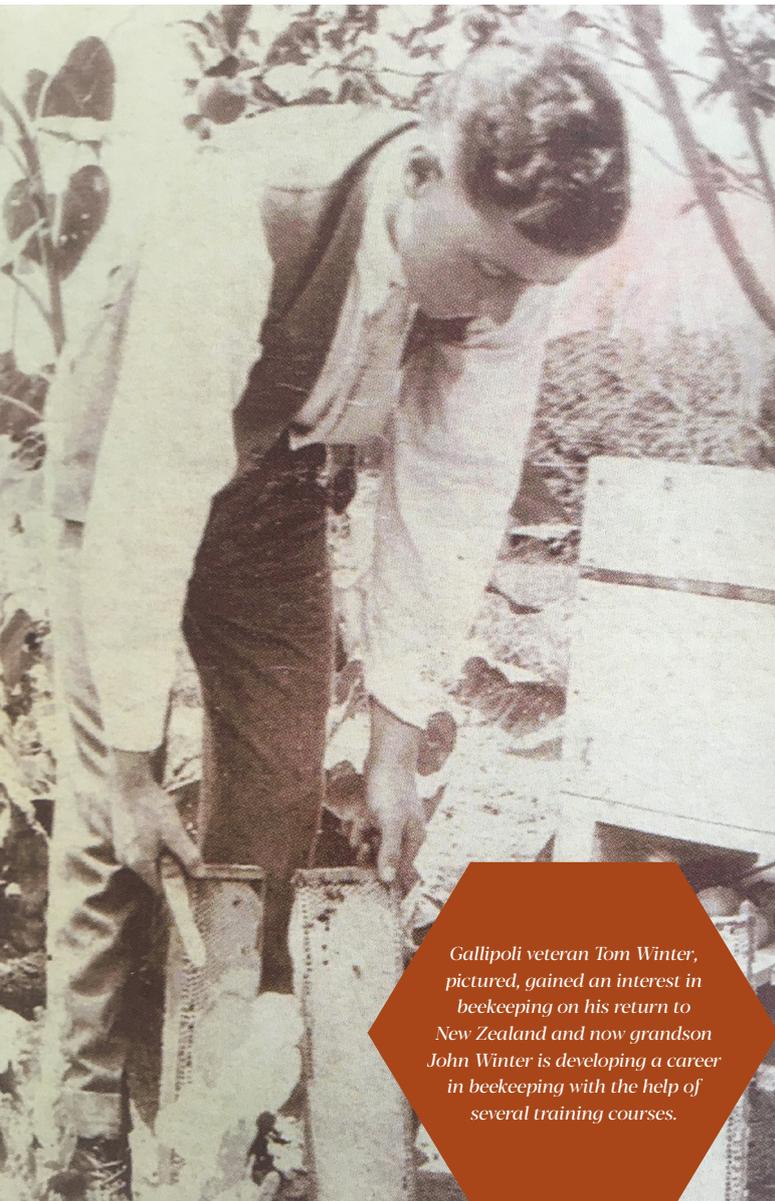
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# Student to Commercial Beekeeper



In Nelson, John Winter has gone from hiring a hive, to a training course, his own hives and now a full-time position with Sherry Valley Honey. We find out how Level 3 and 4 apiculture training has helped set him up for a beekeeping career, in an example of how training and a thirst for knowledge is achieving good results for both student and employer.



*Gallipoli veteran Tom Winter, pictured, gained an interest in beekeeping on his return to New Zealand and now grandson John Winter is developing a career in beekeeping with the help of several training courses.*

**Perhaps John Winter was always destined to be a beekeeper.**

His grandfather, Tom Winter, after being wounded at Gallipoli, was rehabilitated by way of beekeeper training at Ruakura (Hamilton) in 1917. Within a couple of years he bought into a commercial honey venture near Little River in Canterbury. He went on to be the Secretary of the Honey Packers Association in the early 1920's before joining the Department of Agriculture as an apiary inspector and honey grader. At the time of his retirement in 1958 he had more than 40 years in the industry.

With that family history in mind, John just had to check out beekeeping for himself. Like many, he started with a hive rental.

"It's fair to say, from that point I was hooked," Winter says.

## **GETTING STUCK IN**

After buying his own hive he quickly built up to 10. At which point he enrolled in a Level 3 beekeeping course held in Wakefield, Nelson. The course was a mixture of self-paced learning, some assessments, monthly apiary visits at a teaching apiary and monthly evening catch-ups.

"Completing that, I felt more comfortable about what was required, not only from a regulatory compliance point of view, but also how to manage bee health," Winter says.

He progressed quickly, providing some early teaching nucs for the course he had just completed.

Early on he learned the seasonal vagaries of beekeeping. After a cracker season producing a commercial volume of manuka/honey dew blend, the following season was a complete dud.

This was just the start. Entering commercial beekeeping he felt like there was still a lot to learn.

"Knowing the theory and science is one thing, but you don't have the luxury of time in a commercial operation. Everything is magnified. You cannot tarry."

Grateful to various supervisors for their knowledge and experience, he found that every little bit has helped. He learned about the myriad of ways of doing things: single versus double queens, plastic versus woodware, cells versus mated queens, and many other issues.

"You go with what works well for you and your budget," he says.

### GRAFTING TOWARDS MORE KNOWLEDGE

Now, after a couple of commercial seasons, he's currently working through two Level 4 course, one which is completely distance learning. It involves online modules with tests, on-the-job training, with work signed off by a supervisor, and an apicultural business plan.

He misses the human contact though.

"The fun of these courses is making new contacts and being able to share knowledge and experience in a non-judgmental environment."

By way of contrast, the group dynamic has been the virtue of his Level 4 queen rearing course he is also currently undertaking. It includes a blend of online modules, monthly apiary visits held over two days and monthly group discussions via Zoom. Records are kept identifying key traits of breeder queens and graphing results.

"To my mind, producing your own queens is something that any good beekeeper should aspire to," Winter says.

He points out that queen raising introduces a whole raft of intricacies to his beekeeping practice and he has found grafting queens is not an easy task.

"You need good eyesight, a steady hand, a proper environment to graft in, and patience! But I'm getting better with each graft and I hope to be able to progress from the current Chinese grafting tool I use to a sable brush."

He doesn't expect to be employed as a grafter at his current workplace, Sherry Valley Honey, but it will allow him to raise his own cells and help requeen his 20 hives.

As a keen member of the Nelson Beekeepers Club, with their regular array of guest speakers he has also added to his expanding network of experience. Winter is assisting managing the club's teaching apiary and can now help new beekeepers with their many questions.

As we draw to the end of another season, Winter and his crew are hard-out honey harvesting with a view to finishing in early April. It will then be time to return some apiaries back to over-wintering sites and to prepare them for wintering down.

Now, eight years after starting out beekeeping, he finds all the training, both through courses and on the job, has been invaluable.

"All in all, I have enjoyed the learning experience I have gained from the various courses. There is always something to learn, and the seasonal and regional variations means that no two years are the same. I'm better prepared, as a result of my studies, to understand and identify what's happening in the hives, and how to deal with it.

"To anyone contemplating doing further beekeeping study, I would highly recommend it and employers should look favorably on those who have taken the time and effort to improve themselves and to look after the health and wellbeing of our favorite insect." 

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# Five Years in, ApiNZ Seeks More Support



A mix of addressing the immediate concerns of beekeepers and implementing longer-term strategies to advance the apiculture industry is how Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ) chief executive Karin Kos sees the industry body's work. That balancing act was prevalent in 2020 with several important issues requiring swift action to keep beekeepers working and honey being traded, Kos says, and she appeals for more beekeepers to take up membership and support their work.

ApiNZ is New Zealand's largest industry body for beekeepers, claiming to represent around 2500 beekeepers through direct memberships or those who are members of affiliated clubs. However, Kos would like to increase those numbers and is appealing for more of New Zealand's just over 9500 registered apiarists to join ApiNZ's ranks.

April marks five years in existence for ApiNZ, which formed following a restructure of the former National Beekeepers Association. Since establishment, Kos has held the full-time role of chief executive, leading a team of three additional part-time staff based in Wellington, while a Board of eight governs operations.

The Board includes commercial beekeepers, one hobbyist and two from the market sector, representing a membership base that includes beekeepers with one hive to those with thousands.

Thus far the model is working and the range of members allows ApiNZ to gain a thorough understanding of what is happening across the apiculture industry, the chief executive believes.

"We represent the whole supply chain, from beekeepers, to marketers, to suppliers. There are points of difference along that supply chain, but a lot of the issues we face are similar," Kos says.

Since formation in April 2016, ApiNZ has built a cohesive relationship with government, something which has been sorely needed, the chief executive says.

"The mandate when we set up ApiNZ was to unite as one industry, to pool our resources to allow us to get a lot more done and improve engagement with government.

"Quite frankly, if you all go along with your own issues then the government does not want to listen to that. They want a united group that represents the broader beekeeping industry."

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As the “national industry good body across the whole supply chain”, reaching consensus with government is important to how ApiNZ operates.

“We like to work collaboratively and constructively with key stakeholders, particularly the likes of the Ministry for Primary Industries. We need to be firm, but we will get a lot further and reach resolutions to problems by being cooperative and collaborative.”

In 2020, clear communication channels with government departments proved beneficial to beekeepers, as ApiNZ worked through trade issues surrounding glyphosate testing in honey and helped put in place practical measures to overcome the disruptions of Covid-19 and various lockdowns. Balancing the immediate needs of beekeepers that arise, such as through those two issues, with the need to implement long-term strategies to support the growth of apiculture in New Zealand is key to the industry body’s work.

“Our vision is to have a thriving long-term future for our honey and bee products. With an industry that has had such strong growth and the growing pains that come with that, we must ask, ‘what do we need to do and what is the strategy we have in place to address those issues?’,” Kos says.

One major issue is the need to gain better prices for New Zealand’s monofloral honeys other than manuka. The New Zealand Story marketing tools that ApiNZ collaborated on with the New Zealand Story Group in 2020 was “the light touch” on that



Helping beekeepers promote a range of monofloral honeys is a key aspect of ApiNZ’s work, the chief executive says.

matter and ApiNZ is now exploring ways to continue to address the problem of low honey prices.

Supporting work such as that is sighted, by Kos, as a reason why beekeepers should take up ApiNZ membership, along with practical member benefits such as discounted honey testing and national conference registrations, access to regular market updates, and the likes of last year’s winter-webinar series to spread beekeeping and industry knowledge.

Five years in, Kos says she is still enjoying being at the helm of ApiNZ and is motivated, particularly by the challenge of increasing the value of New Zealand honey.

“I think we have so much potential as an industry. I am an optimist, and I know it is tough out there,” she says, adding, “but collectively, with the product we have got, I think we have an opportunity to ramp things up, to unlock the value.” 

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*A Sting in the Tale* is a new monthly segment featuring stories of beekeeping mishaps. From accidents in the field, characters encountered, to nasty stings or just being in the wrong place at the wrong time, like this tale of adventure from Pukekawa beekeeper PETE THOMAS.

## Wasp Vac Attack



**As mid-Autumn approaches, I'm reminded of how I first became involved in beekeeping one balmy evening some five years ago...**

It started with an idea to earn some extra cash by extracting a large swamp kauri log from the bottom paddock. It would've been a simple job if not for the number of yellow jacket German wasps flying about. They immediately drew my focus and I foolishly decided to locate and destroy the nest prior to pulling the log out of the scrub.

Like any other male, I consulted Dr Google for a solution and soon found a video of a professional pest controller from Ohio USA vacuuming a hornet nest out. So, I thought "If he could do it, then surely I could?" As I happen to have a petrol-powered Yard Vac machine, it wasn't very long before my course of fate was underway through yet another moment of Kiwi innovation.

Moments later I emerged from the shed with a roll of duct tape, a large length of drainage pipe, and an evil grin upon my face as I sized up the unsuspecting Yard Vac. Basically it is an over-sized mower with an equally-oversized vacuum head attached to the front. It does a great job removing leaves and small twigs, but within moments I had transformed it into a Mad Max-themed Snuffleupagus with the black drainage pipe taped securely to the front entrance.

Naturally I tested the device first before putting it to practical use on a real live wasp nest, and soon after confirming "suction" at the end of the pipe, my real-life prototype was careening down the paddock in the back of my ute.

This would have been a sensible place to stop. Instead, I eagerly unloaded the machine from the ute and gently nudged the end of the pipe in to the entrance of the nest. "Gently", because there's no point in being really stupid in this life-threatening situation, eh? Once the pipe was wedged in, I made my way back to the Yard Vac and yanked the line. The engine roared into life and I laughed with glee watching wasps being sucked to their doom through the pipe into the rotating blades.

Leaning upon the ute, I relaxed and giggled for several minutes longer as the vacuum continued running. I could hear the little blighters bumping against the sides of the pipe, giving me confidence that the nest would soon be eradicated. The aggravated wasps at the nest entrance had no clue what to sting and with every attack of the pipe, another wasp was sucked into oblivion. Or so I thought...

The first problem sign showed up in the form of some very anxious and angry wasps milling about. I then noticed that there was a hole in the Yard Vac catcher whereby wasps were being blown out in my general direction. When I turned the machine off to patch the hole with my duct tape, another problem became obvious.

It turned out that the tape not only held the pipe in place, but now it also served as a device of torture by pinning the wasps down on their back while they struggled inside the cavity of the Yard Vac. As nature had intended them to survive stormy winds, they also seemed well prepared to tolerate my low-pressure vacuum chamber equally well. The problem was escalating before my eyes, and now ears, as I listened to the intensifying hum of aggravated wasps writhing, wriggling, and eventually escaping from inside the machine.

So here I was, in the heat of the day, shorts and singlet being my ill-chosen form of protective clothing, and a looming cloud of slightly confused, but still very much enabled, aggravated wasps nearby. This scenario hadn't played in my mind, and certainly wasn't explained in the instructional video either!

As you can no doubt guess, I managed to escape an almost certain death by quietly creeping away from the swarm so as not to draw attention to myself. I jumped in the car, locked the door, and sighed a little relief as I reassessed my career aspiration to become a pest controller.

That afternoon I ended up buying my first full-length bee-suit online, with the aim to fight those pesky wasps another day...

*What's your best beekeeping yarn? We'd love to hear about your beekeeping tale of humour or misfortune.*

**Email:** [editor@apiadvocate.co.nz](mailto:editor@apiadvocate.co.nz) 🐝



*Attaching a homemade wasp vacuum to a nest did not quite go to plan for Pete Thomas.*

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# Why Plant Diversity is so Important for Bee Diversity



It is common to see both bumble bees and honey bees foraging on the same flower species during the summer and researchers in Britain, at the University of Sussex, have found that different bees dominate particular flower species. They reveal why.

**By studying 22 flower species in southern England and analysing the behaviour of more than 1000 bees, they found that 'energy efficiency' is a key factor when it comes to mediating competition.**

Bee bodyweight and the rate at which a bee visits flowers determine how energy efficient they are. Bodyweight determines the energy used while flying and walking between flowers, with a

bee that is twice as heavy using twice as much energy. The rate at which a bee visits flowers, the number of flowers per minute, determines how much nectar, and therefore energy, it collects. Together, the ratio of these factors determines bee foraging energy efficiency.

"While they forage on the same flowers, frequently we find that bumble bees will outnumber honey bees on a particular flower species, while the reverse will be true on a different species growing

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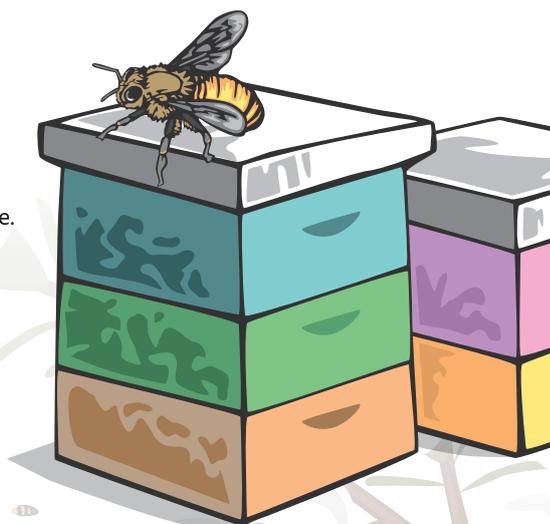
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nearby" says the British university's professor of apiculture, Francis Ratnieks.

"What was remarkable was that differences in foraging energy efficiency explained almost fully why bumble bees predominated on some flower species and honey bees on others.

"In essence, bumble bees have an advantage over honey bees in being faster at visiting flowers, so can gather more nectar and therefore energy, but a disadvantage in being larger, and so using more of the nectar energy to power their foraging. On some flower species this gave an overall advantage to bumble bees, but on others to honey bees."

In the study, published in the journal *Ecology*, the researchers used stopwatches to determine how many flowers a bee visited in one minute. Using a portable electronic balance to weigh each bee, researchers found that, on average, bumble bees are almost twice as heavy as the honey bees. This means that they use almost twice as much energy as honey bees. The stopwatch results showed that they visit flowers at twice the rate of honey bees, which compensate in terms of energy efficiency.

On some flower species, such as lavender, bumble bees dominated, visiting flowers at almost three times the rate of honey bees.

The differences in the morphology of flowers impacted greatly on how energy efficient the two bee types were. Ling heather, with its mass of small flowers was better suited to the nimbler honey bee. By contrast, Erica heather, which researchers found growing beside the ling heather in the same nature reserve, has large bell-shaped flowers and was better suited to bumble bees.

"The energy efficiency of foraging is particularly important to bees," research author Dr Nick Balfour explains.

"The research showed that the bees were walking, and flying, a challenging energy tightrope; half the energy they obtained from the nectar was expended in its collection."

Energy (provided by nectar for bees) is a fundamental need, but the fact that honey bees and bumble bees do not compete head

on for nectar is reassuring in terms of conservation and co-existence.

"Bumble bees have a foraging advantage on some plants, and predominate on them, while honey bees have an advantage on others and predominate on these" Ratnieks says.

"Bee conservation therefore benefits from flower diversity, so that should certainly be a focus on bee conservation efforts. But fortunately, flowering plants are diverse." 🌱

## Get in touch



Email [editor@apiadvocate.co.nz](mailto:editor@apiadvocate.co.nz) with:

- Feedback
- News tips
- *A Sting in the Tale* yarns

## Want to tell beekeeping stories and earn some extra income?

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Bumble bees and honey bees often forage on different flowers, and researchers in England have found that energy efficiency is a major determining factor in their dining habits.



# Look South...



BY IAN FLETCHER

The news over recent weeks will have had us looking North. From warnings of Chinese intentions towards Taiwan, through the tariffs imposed on Australian exports to China, the continuing tussle over the South China Sea, the Myanmar coup, the tension on the Sino-Indian border, the treatment of Uyghur people in Xinjiang, to the enduring nightmares in Syria and Ethiopia, we'd be forgiven for thinking that there was a lot of trouble in the world, but none (fortunately) near us. In the short term, that may be right, and we can feel a bit smug.

But in the longer term, disputes over Antarctica may come to bother New Zealand a great deal. If that does happen, we will be the front line. The time for smugness will be over.

Antarctica's status and activities on the continent are governed by the Antarctic Treaty. It's not a global agreement, just one among participating countries. There's no 'enforcement', just mutual commitments and – so far – goodwill and generally good behaviour.

Yet for six decades, the treaty has been the cornerstone of governance for our most pristine continent, and one of New Zealand's nearest neighbours. It has fostered scientific research,

promoted international cooperation, ensured non-militarisation, suspended territorial claims (including ours) and strengthened environmental protections.

Meanwhile research continues apace. Robots and drones are peering under ice shelves, swimming the ocean and monitoring glaciers. It's important: the climate means the Antarctic has lost three million tonnes of ice since 1992.

What could go wrong? There are also likely to be huge untapped mineral resources. We know there are vast fish stocks – already under pressure. The temptation to break ranks and start state-backed commercial exploitation of the Antarctic can only grow. Open militarisation of the Antarctic – or part of it – would be a direct threat to New Zealand, because we offer one of the best access routes, and weakest ability to resist. Spillover of any conflict in Asia or the North Pacific would be just as bad, though we may have more support.

It's important to note that this needn't be a matter of formal, declared war. A bit of piracy, illegal fishers who resist, or undeclared militarisation would give New Zealand some big security and law and order headaches.

What shall we do? Hoping it doesn't happen, and that our allies will take the strain is a poor policy. We need to get better prepared.

*Ian Fletcher is a former chief executive of the UK Patents Office, free trade negotiator with the European Commission, biosecurity expert for the Queensland government and head of New Zealand's security agency. These days he is a commercial flower grower in the Wairarapa and consultant to the apiculture industry through both the Manuka Charitable Trust and NZ Beekeeping Inc. 🐝*

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# Global Shortages in a Covid World Drives Costs Up



BY DAVE WRATHALL  
CEO Ecrotek Beekeeping Supplies

As a supplier into the industry, one of our objectives is to provide a quality product and service at a fair price to our customers. Our procurement and product management team work closely with our suppliers to ensure we are getting the best of both – a fair price and a quality product, be it raw materials for our production/manufacturing, or finished goods.

**The last 12 months have thrown many challenges to us all, in many ways. From a business perspective, the biggest challenges for Ecrotek have been two-fold: getting product delivered when we expect it, and the increasing costs of the product, including the associated freight costs.**

As background, Covid has changed global purchasing patterns. Consumers have moved from spending on services (travel, restaurants, bars etc) to goods. Trillions of dollars have been diverted into treadmills, bikes, computers, new furniture, house renovations, new coffee machines ... the list goes on. This huge spike in demand for goods has put enormous strain on the global supply chain. From the energy to run production plants, to the cost of the raw materials as demand outstrips supply, through to the demand for empty containers and availability of container ships.

For Ecrotek, two of our core raw materials are resin for plastic hiveware, and timber for boxes and wooden frames. The simple

supply-demand model applies at present, so prices are rising for those materials, at levels greater than we have ever experienced. Along with this, wage levels are creeping up and that our customers will be familiar with.

On top of this is shipping. From a NZ Herald article:

*Containers that carried millions of masks to countries in Africa and South America early in the pandemic remain there, empty and uncollected, because shipping carriers have concentrated their vessels on their most popular routes — those linking North America and Europe to Asia.*

*And at ports where ships do call, bearing goods to unload, they are frequently stuck for days in floating traffic jams. The pandemic and its restrictions have limited the availability of dockworkers and truck drivers, causing delays in handling cargo from Southern California to Singapore. Every container that cannot be unloaded in one place is a container that cannot be loaded somewhere else.*

*"I've never seen anything like this," said Lars Mikael Jensen, head of Global Ocean Network at AP Moller-Maersk, the world's largest shipping company. "All the links in the supply chain are stretched. The ships, the trucks, the warehouses."*

For Ecrotek's imported raw materials and finished goods, shipping prices have increased six-fold in recent months. Yes, six times for each container delivered to our door.

So how are we managing this situation? First and foremost, we are in constant contact with our suppliers and shipping agents, maintaining a strong relationship. We are endeavouring to secure supply in a timely manner, so that our lead times to manufacturing meet our customers' needs in terms of timing. We have also looked at how much of this increased cost we can absorb across our product range. And where we can, we have. Unfortunately, we have not been able to absorb all the increases, so have had to address our prices.

We do expect things to settle down, but all indications are that it will be at least another 12 months. As time progresses, and the supply-demand curve re-balances, we will look at all prices to ensure we continue to provide a quality product at a fair price.

If you are an Ecrotek customer reading this, thanks again for your ongoing support, and patience in this difficult environment. And we wish you best of luck with your beekeeping business and/or hobby in 2021. 🐝



Dave Wrathall,  
Ecrotek  
Beekeeping  
Supplies CEO

# C'mon Beekeepers – Have Your Say



A recent proposal to introduce bylaws at a local Council level that would impact beekeeping in his area has ROGER BRAY, a New Zealand Beekeeping Inc (NZBI) executive member and Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ) member disappointed at the lack of response by beekeepers to the “onerous” proposals. He outlines the consultation processes used to introduce change and why beekeepers should be paying more attention to them and imploring their representatives to act too.

**The December 2020 issue of *Apiarist's Advocate* featured an article on proposed changes to Selwyn Council (Canterbury) bylaws, and more recently on Television One's Fair Go there was an article about bee poo on peoples' windows in Auckland causing concern, and resident's seeking a solution. Both are issues where the keeping of bees was perceived to be negatively impacting on the wider community.**

Recently I spoke at the Selwyn Council hearing on behalf of NZBI, mainly because the proposed bylaws, if accepted by council, would have required all beekeepers in the council area to provide water for their bees at each apiary property. They would also give the Council the ability to stipulate where on a property hives can be sited, which they would take guidance from ApiNZ on.

We might not all know the process, but generally speaking community leaders (government, councils, regulated bodies) develop and present a proposal then invite submissions from

those that will be subject to complying to the proposal. This is the democratic process where the authorities assess feedback and then, based on the evidence provided, make a final decision on the proposal.

In a lot of instances communities get stuck with sometimes dumb rules, simply because the community failed to respond and speak against a proposal.

There are always a number of proposals going on that it has become impossible for people to keep up. For instance, Government is seeking comment on climate change. A 188-page document of technical data that the average person would not understand anyway.

Now let's get to the issue of bees. Councils faced with 'complaints' from neighbours have introduced restrictions on beekeeping so that the community may be a more harmonious place to live. Within urban areas now most councils limit the number of beehives that can be kept, likewise they have rules around the keeping of other livestock that are more suited to a farm environment.

We often wonder about the logic and reasoning behind the introduction of rules and some are pretty obvious. Bee poo on windows, cars and washing is one of those things that only limits on numbers of bees can help solve, as it is not possible to stop bees taking a dump.

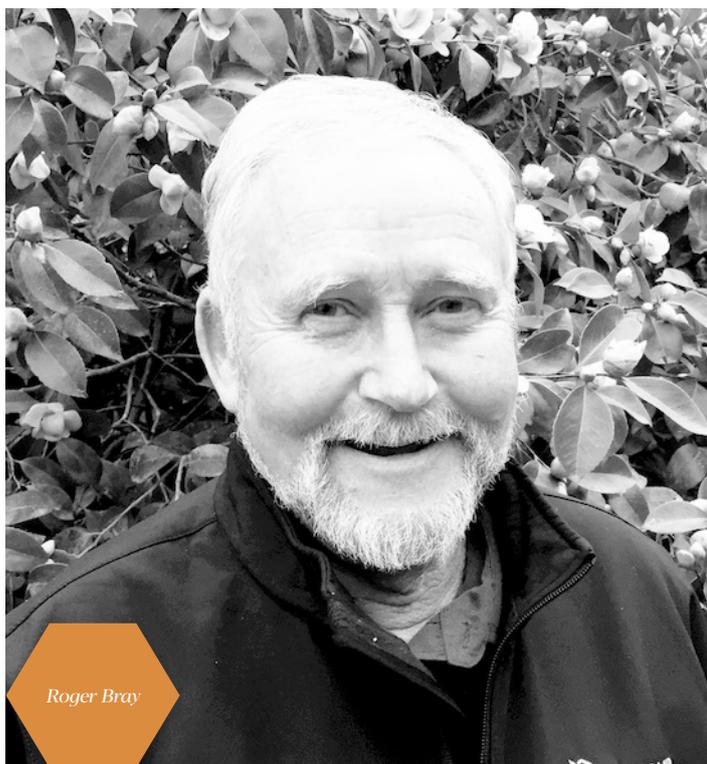
However, in the case of Selwyn area, why would the council need the power to stipulate where on a property hives may be sited? Why also would they need to consult with ApiNZ for advice in the siting of bees? What greater expertise do the 'administrative' type people have over the experience of practical beekeepers?

What prompted the council to require beekeepers to provide water for bees on the property? Who or what organisation is providing this sort of advice to Council?

With all those sorts of questions floating in the air (or buzzing like a robbing bee!), the proposal by Selwyn Council, I would have thought, should have prompted a response from the beekeepers of the district.

However, there were 13 submissions received by council, 11 of which were of the tenor that bees should be excluded from the urban area. It was obvious these were mostly from people that lived nearby hives which they considered a nuisance.

There were two people in general support of bees being allowed to be kept in urban areas. The NZBI submission and appearance



Roger Bray

at the hearing (in the form of myself) provided some balance on the issue of keeping bees in urban areas and being totally opposed to the proposal for the rural environment, where the production of food is the priority.

I applied for copies of all submissions on the proposals and, within the copies of submissions forwarded to me, I failed to see any submission from ApiNZ and I did not recognise any beekeeper with a large holding of hives.

Where is the beekeeping industry going and who is watching our backs?

If the proposal had gone ahead how would beekeepers provide and maintain a watering system on each of the properties which they have bees?

As a result of the process, I am a little more confident now that it is unlikely the proposal regarding water will go ahead, but what if NZBI had not responded to the proposal?

As beekeepers we need to be aware of governance decisions that are being made and be prepared to act appropriately. It's all part of the process, but if we don't speak up then we won't be heard. 🐝



Beekeepers could be required to provide a water source for bees should proposed new bylaws in Canterbury come into place.





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# Feedbee Supplier Looks to Sell Up



Neil Farrer has been beekeeping for more than 40 years and, despite being in his 80s, he plans to carry on with some hives. That will mean finding a way to slow down from work life though. So, 14 years after launching his Apiary Services supply business, he is looking to sell up. The Feedbee agent in New Zealand explains the product, the nature of the business he has built and the kind of person he believes will be best suited to take over.

Apiary Services, currently based in Farrer's home town of Whanganui, is primarily known as the supplier of Feedbee pollen substitute to Kiwi beekeepers, but there are other strings to the business's bow.

In recent years Farrer has added some organic varroa treatment supplies to the catalogue, such as oxalic acid foggers and staples, plus he says he is always advising beekeepers and helping solve problems in the hives.

"The aim is to help beekeepers help their beehives. That is where it started from and that has been my emphasis," Farrer says.

The initial product to help beehives was Feedbee, a pollen substitute for hives which is made entirely from vegetable material and not collected pollen. Feedbee's Canadian inventor appealed to Farrer to be the agent for the new product in New Zealand, and so Apiary Services was born, importing and supplying Feedbee in 20kg bags. Farrer also mixes the dry material and sells it as a paste or "ready-to-use" Feedbee patties.

The dramatic drop in honey prices and beekeepers' resulting squeeze on spending in recent times has had a profound impact on Apiary Services' trade. However, Farrer is confident the business will make a good investment for the right person.

"The industry has changed a lot in the last two or three years of course. In previous years it has been a very successful business and my accountant said he had people who would kill to have a company that ran as well.

"Now, beekeepers have to look very carefully at every dollar they spend. Companies like mine have got the same problem – cash flow has taken a hiding, but that will come back again I'm sure. These rural enterprises go up and down.

"A younger person will come in with a different emphasis and different drive and possibly a different marketing approach. I think it is time for that," Farrer says.

Ideally that person will be motivated to mingle with the beekeeping community, something which Farrer says he has enjoyed.

"It has been very rewarding and I have met a lot of beekeepers, in both North and South Islands, and have made a lot of friends because of it." 



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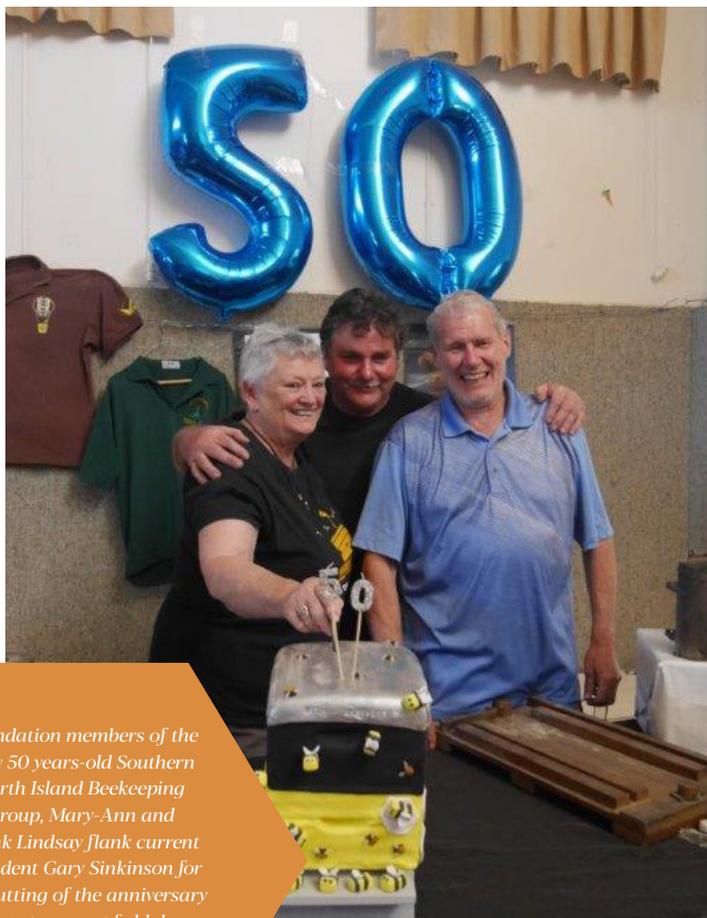
# Reporting from an Anniversary Field Day



**The Southern North Island Beekeeping Group (SNIBG) celebrated their 50-year anniversary last month with a field day in Manakau on March 14. Foundation member FRANK LINDSAY reports on an educational occasion, sharing some of the key points raised by their guest speakers, detailing their look through some hives and, of course, some anniversary cake!**

The occasion was spread into three sections, starting with our guest speakers in the morning, followed by an afternoon in the hives, then back to the hall for further speakers and discussions, plus cutting of the anniversary cake.

About 50 people attended, meaning beekeepers could stand close to hives and see what was going on during the afternoon session outside, after two very interesting guest speakers captured attention before lunch.



Foundation members of the now 50 years-old Southern North Island Beekeeping Group, Mary-Ann and Frank Lindsay flank current president Gary Sinkinson for the cutting of the anniversary cake at a recent field day.  
Photo: J O'Brien.

Prof. Phil Lester from Victoria University of Wellington spoke of recent research into American foulbrood (AFB). There are now five ERIC types of AFB in the world, of which we have the main two, ERIC I and ERIC II, in New Zealand. One takes 12.5 days to kill the larva (80% of cases) and the other takes about a week to kill the larva (20% of cases), but can take up to three years to show clinical signs.

As we learn more about AFB, early detection using new science and different techniques to find and eliminate AFB will be the key to reducing the instance of this disease, Lester told the crowd.

Our second speaker was local "Ant Man", pest exterminator Brent Page. He was enlightening and offered tips on the two species of ants that affect us and our beehives, they being white footed ants and Argentine ants.

We mainly find white footed ant under the crown boards of hives and they can also inhabit our houses. These ants are a terrestrial inland species spending most of their time in trees. To prevent them getting into our homes we should trim any overhanging branches that touch our houses and make sure fence lines also don't touch our houses.

Argentine ants are a coastal ant mostly inhabiting the sand country. They are a real problem, with colonies cooperating to form super groups. Being sugar ants, they can overwhelm a hive causing bees to abscond.

They naturally spread slowly but have gradually spread down the North Island mostly by being moved by humans in pot plants



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and perhaps on beehives. They are just starting to move into Wellington city.

Page said pest exterminators have a greater range of chemicals available to them, but the householder can purchase products that work well too. Killing an ant nest takes time. It's best to get the whole neighbourhood involved as individual spot killing is less effective.

The afternoon session was mostly spent looking into hives provided by a local beekeeper, for which we were very grateful. We carried out a mite wash, and despite having been treated early with Bayvarol, mite counts were high and it was decided these hives needed a treatment that would reduce their numbers quickly. It was a sobering lesson to those attending.

Back at the hall we had a general discussion on varroa mite treatments. Reuben Stanley from Bee Green explained how to use Apivar-life, Neil Farrer from Apiary Services demonstrated fogging and cords, while Allan Richards told us about staples and how he uses miticides.

Gary Sinkinson explained that just treating in the spring and autumn was putting hives at risk in areas where there is a high density of beehives and resistant mites. He encouraged beekeepers to monitor mite levels monthly, so they can find and treat the odd hive that has high mite levels early, before they cause problems later in the season.

He recommended that everybody should try different alternative mite treatments on a few hives and work out what worked for them, in their area.



*Chris Valentine tries to spot varroa mites during a visit to the hives at SNIBG's field day in Manuka.  
Photo: J Withington.*

The other take home message is to try and organise every beekeeper in the area to treat at the same time to prevent re-invasion into already treated hives.

The 50th anniversary cake was cut by myself and wife Mary-Ann Lindsay, as we were foundation members of the South Western District branch which has gone on to become SNIBG.

All in all, a very informative field day. Here's to the next 50! 🐝

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